Patent Claims

1.   A method for admitting an information provider (A_1) to a
method for switching information between information providers
(A_1 to A_n) and information seekers (N_1 to N_n) via a switching
device (2), characterized by the following method steps:
- receiving test data (TD) which have been transmitted by an
  information provider (A_1) to the switching device (2) and
  which represent information (I_1) offered by the information
  provider (A_1),
- evaluation of the quality of the test data (TD) by the
  switching device (2), and
- admission of the information provider (A_1) by the switching
  device (2) to the method for switching information between
  information providers (A_1 to A_n) and information seekers (N_1
  to N_n) in dependence on the quality of the test data (TD).

2.   The method as claimed in claim 1, characterized in that
the reception of test data (TD) is preceded by the following
steps:
- receiving offer signaling data (ASD) which have been
  transmitted to the switching device (2) by an information
  provider (A_1),
- sending test request data (TAD) from the switching device
  (2) to the information provider (A_1).

3.   The method as claimed in one of the preceding claims,
characterized in that the method for switching information
between information providers (A_1 to A_n) and information
seekers (N_1 to N_n) via a switching device (2) comprises the
following steps:

- receiving information enquiry data (ND) which have been transmitted to the switching device (2) by information seekers (N_1 to N_n),
- receiving information offer data (AD) which have been transmitted to the switching device (2) by an admitted information provider (A_1 to A_n) and which represent information (I_1 to I_n) offered by the respective information provider (A_1 to A_n),
- comparing the information enquiry data (ND) and the information offer data (AD) for determining corresponding information enquiry data (ND) and information offer data (AD), and
- transmitting search result data (SD) to a terminal of an information seeker (N_1 to N_n) if the information enquiry data (ND) of the information seeker (N_1 to N_n) correspond to the information offer data (AD) of an information provider (A_1 to A_n).

4.   The method as claimed in one of the preceding claims, characterized in that test data (TD) and/or information offer data (AD) are transmitted encrypted between an information provider (A_1 to A_n) and the switching device (2).

5.   The method as claimed in one of claims 3 or 4, characterized in that information enquiry data (ND) and/or search result data (SD) are transmitted encrypted between an information seeker (N_1 to N_n) and the switching device.

6.   The method as claimed in one of the preceding claims, characterized in that the evaluation of the quality of the test data (TD) is stored correlated with the corresponding information provider (A_1) in the switching device (2) in order to generate

an evaluation history correlated with the corresponding information provider (A_1), and

that the admission of the information provider (A_1) by the switching device (2) to the method for switching information between information providers (A_1 to A_n) and information seekers (N_1 to N_n) is made dependent on the evaluation history of the information provider (A_1).

7.   The method as claimed in one of the preceding claims, characterized in that the quality of the information switched to an information seeker (N_1) is evaluated by the information seeker (N_1),

that the evaluation of the quality is transmitted from the information seeker (N_1) to the switching device (2) and is stored correlated with the corresponding information provider (A_1) in the switching device (2) in order to generate an evaluation history correlated with the corresponding information provider (A_1), and

that the admission of the information provider (A_1) by the switching device (2) to the method for switching information between information providers (A_1 to A_n) and information seekers (N_1 to N_n) is made dependent on the evaluation history of the information provider (A_1).

8.   The method as claimed in one of the preceding claims, characterized in that

an information seeker (N_1 to N_n) first transmits the information enquiry data (ND) to an enquirer function unit (3) allocated to the information seeker (N_1 to N_n) and the information enquiry data (ND) are automatically forwarded from there at least partially to the switching device (2) and/or

that the switching device (2) transmits the search result data (SD) to the enquirer function unit (3) which

sorts or normalizes information offer data (AD) contained
therein and/or associated information provider data before they
are transmitted to the information seeker (N_1 to N_n).

9.   The method as claimed in one of the preceding claims,
characterized in that
an information provider (A_1 to A_n) first transmits the
information offer data (AD) to a provider function unit (4)
associated with the information provider (A_1 to A_n) and the
information offer data (AD) are automatically forwarded from
there at least partially to the switching device (2), and/or
that the switching device (2) transmits information enquiry
data (ND) matching the information offer data (AD) of the
information provider (A_1 to A_n) to the provider function unit
(4) which initiates the more detailed comparison with the
information (I_1 to I_n) represented by the information offer
data (AD) by the associated data comparison device (5).

10.   The method as claimed in one of the preceding claims,
characterized in that
the evaluation of the quality and/or the evaluation history is
transmitted to the information seeker (N_1).

11.   A switching device (2) comprising
- a provider test interface device (16) for receiving test
  data (TD) which were transmitted to the switching device (2)
  by an information provider (A_1) and which represent
  information (I_1) offered by the information provider (A_1),
- an evaluation device (17) which is constructed for
  evaluating the quality of test data (TD), and
- a control unit (10) which is constructed in such a manner
  that the admission of the information provider (A_1) to a
  method

for switching information is made dependent on the quality of the test data (TD).

12. The switching device (2) as claimed in claim 11, comprising
- a number of enquirer interface devices (7) for receiving information enquiry data (ND) which were transmitted to the switching device (2) by information seekers (N_1 to N_n), and for sending search result data (SD) to terminals of the relevant information seekers (N_1 to N_n),
- a number of provider interface devices (8) for receiving information offer data (AD) which were transmitted to the switching device (2) by information providers (A_1 to A_n) and which represent information (I_1 to I_n) offered by the respective information provider (A_1 to A_n),
- a comparison unit (11) for comparing the information enquiry data (ND) and the information offer data (AD) for determining corresponding information enquiry data (ND) and information offer data (AD),
- a control unit (10) which causes search result data (SD) to be transmitted to the terminal of an information seeker (N_1 to N_n) if the information enquiry data (ND) of the relevant information seeker (N_1 to N_n) correspond to the information offer data (AD) of an information provider (A_1 to A_n).

13. The switching device as claimed in claim 11 or 12, characterized by a storage device (9) for storing the evaluation of the quality of test data.